

Rose

by Brandon

Category: X-Files
Language: English
Status: In-Progress
Published: 1999-03-14 09:00:00
Updated: 1999-03-14 09:00:00
Packaged: 2016-04-27 09:49:00
Rating: K+
Chapters: 1
Words: 4,432
Publisher: www.fanfiction.net
Summary: An artists reflects on an unusual commission.

Rose

> <meta name="GENERATOR"> Rose.html TITLE: Rose
>SPOILER WARNING: None
RATING: PG, I think. Nudity, but not in a sexual context
>CONTENT WARNING: MSR implied but not overt.
CLASSIFICATION: SR

>SUMMARY: An artist reflect on a remarkable commission.

Rose

by Brandon D. Ray
> <p>

Today I received a postcard from the redhead; a postcard from Rose.

That's the name she gave me when she offered me the commission, but for several reasons I'm almost certain it isn't really hers. But she paid me handsomely for my work, in cash, and she's allowed me to truly express myself in the bargain, so I can't really complain about a small deception.

I do a lot of work on commission, and to be quite frank a lot of it is crap, suitable only for reproducing on a greeting card. I wish it could be otherwise; I wish I could simply devote all my time and effort to following my muse, but I live in the real world, and I have a family to support.

The day I met Rose I had just put the finishing touches on one of those Hallmark masterpieces I mentioned. It was a stodgy portrait of a stodgy man who wanted something to impress his customers and his board of directors. I gave him what he wanted and he paid me with a purchase order and went away happy. I felt slightly dirtied by the experience, but that was nothing new, and the anticipation of the

check I was going to receive was helping to alleviate that feeling nicely.

So I wasn't really working that afternoon; I was just lounging around the studio, dabbling with this and that and trying to decompress a bit while I considered which project to embark on next. The man whose portrait I'd just finished had paid me sufficiently well that I wouldn't need to accept another commission for several months, unless my daughter actually turned out to need those braces the orthodontist had been talking about.

So I wasn't really in the market for a new commission. But then Rose walked into my studio and changed my mind.

How can I explain how she did it? I really don't have the words. Certainly her initial presentation was not at all tempting.

"I'd like to commission a painting," she said, drawing a photograph from a 9x12 envelope and handing it to me.

I glanced at the photo; it was a screenshot from last year's hit movie. I don't go to films very often, because so many of them are bad art, but even I had seen this one. I told myself at the time that it was just to see what all the shouting was about, but in truth I've always had a bit of a soft spot for tragic romances. The last film I'd seen before that one was a modern remake of one of the Shakespearean tragedies, which by sheer happenstance featured one of the same actors as this one.

"That's copyrighted material," I pointed out, handing it back to her. "And besides, I'm really not in the market right now."

"Please," she said, still holding the photograph. "It's very important. I'll pay you any fee within reason." And she named a price which was high enough to show that she knew the value of my work, but low enough that I still wasn't interested.

I shook my head. "I'm sorry. I --"

"And about the copyright," she said. "I'm willing to have changes made so as to make the painting -- my painting -- original." She suddenly looked rather nervous. "In fact, there's one change I want made in any case. That's part of the point."

I raised my eyebrows and took the photograph back from her and studied it for a moment. Looking back up at her, I suddenly realized what change she would be asking for. "You want me to paint you into this picture instead of the actress," I said.

She actually blushed. "Yes."

For the first time I really looked at her. Oh, I had looked at her when she first entered the studio, of course; I look at everybody. But now I looked at her as a potential subject, and I found I liked what I was seeing.

She was short, for one thing, and I liked that. So many professional models are long-legged greyhounds, and they all look pretty much the same, so much so that they tend to run together in my mind. But this woman was different, and therefore interesting.

For another thing, she was pretty. Hers was not a classic beauty, but more of a solid, middle American handsomeness. She would never draw a second glance at a casting call or on a Las Vegas runway, but there was a healthy sturdiness to her, as well as some undefinable energy, all which had the promise of leading to a masterpiece if handled properly.

Finally, there was her hair: it was a striking reddish-gold, and from the freckles and from her complexion I was pretty sure it was her natural color. All in all, she had the potential to be a very interesting subject.

She shifted uncomfortably in her chair, and I realized that I had been staring at her longer than was really polite. I cleared my throat and returned to business.

"Are you willing to pose for such a picture?" I asked.

She nodded, just a trifle hesitantly. "Of course."

"You understand that it will be necessary for you to pose in the nude." I said it flatly. In dealing with amateur subjects, I've found it's best to be blunt. It either scares them off, or it ensures that they really think it all through before saying yes, and either way it's for the best.

She had obviously already thought it through, because her voice was firmer this time when she repeated, "Of course."

I sat staring thoughtfully at her for a moment, and realized that I actually wanted to accept her commission. This was one of those rare opportunities to produce a work of which I could be proud, and receive a guaranteed payment in the bargain. But there was one more thing I had to ask her.

"I don't wish to pry into your private life," I said. "And your answer will not affect my willingness to take this commission. But I need to know in advance if there is anyone who might object if you posed for such a picture."

She looked puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"Husband; boyfriend. Perhaps a father. Do you understand what I'm getting at?"

Again she blushed, but she shook her head. "N-no," she said. "There's no one like that."

I looked at her for just a moment longer. It seemed to me that her last answer had not been entirely truthful, but it was really none of my business. It's just a standard question I ask the amateurs, because that way I can be prepared when the angry lover comes storming into the studio demanding to know what I've done to the poor girl. So I simply made a mental note that there was a potential for trouble down the line, and filed it away for future reference.

"Very well," I said. "May I keep this photograph?"

"Yes." Pause. "Does that mean you'll accept the job?"

I smiled. "Yes. And for the price you stated." I rose from my seat, and she stood, too. "If you'll return in a week, I should have some preliminary sketches to show you, and then we can work from there. Do you have a number where I can reach you if there should be any problems?"

She hesitated, then took out a dog-eared notebook, scribbled a phone number and then tore out the page and handed it to me. I folded the sheet and tucked it into my pocket. "And do you have a name?"

One last time she hesitated, then her lips quirked slightly and she said, "Rose." And then she turned and went to the door and was gone.

#

A week later she was back. I'd worked hard on the sketches I'd promised her, and finally had produced two that I felt really good about, and four others that I was willing to work with. She sat with me in the studio and studied each sketch intently, holding them in her hands and staring down at them, as if she were looking for something in particular. Finally she drew out one of the sketches and handed it to me. It was one of my two favorites, and that was when I knew for certain that this was going to be a positive experience for both of us.

Three days later we had the first sitting. Rose arrived right on time, and I'd arranged to have my wife present so that she would feel less uncomfortable. There are so many stories about artists and photographers, and I always try to do the best I can to create a homey, comfortable atmosphere, especially when I'm dealing with an amateur.

Rose and my wife hit it off immediately, which didn't surprise me at all. The woman I married is very open and friendly, and gets along with almost everybody. It's one of the many reasons why I love her. And for a few moments the three of us stood together in the studio amiably chatting and getting acquainted. I didn't begrudge the time; anything to help a subject relax, I always say. You hear stories about the artistic temperament, but that's never been me; I like to think I'm a pretty relaxed kind of guy.

Finally we came to the moment of truth. I said, "Well, Rose, I suppose it's time we got started."

She looked suddenly nervous, but she nodded slowly and looked across the room at the set I'd built.

It was actually a pretty good job if I do say so myself. After a number of a phone calls I'd managed to find a friend of a friend who was willing to loan me an Edwardian era chaise longue and a matching end table and lamp. To this I'd added a large blue throw rug from my own home, and for the rest of the "room" I'd used a backdrop of a library which I'd created for a production of "The Importance of Being Earnest" a couple of years before. All in all it was a nice setting, and I was proud of it.

I could see that she liked it too, from the barest hint of a smile

which tugged at the corners of her mouth. I'd already realized that Rose didn't smile much, so when she showed even a suggestion of one it really seemed to mean something. I had a hunch that if she ever pulled out all the stops the effect would be breathtaking.

A few moments later Rose emerged from behind the privacy screen, wearing the robe and slippers I'd suggested she bring with her to help her keep warm during breaks. She glanced over at me hesitantly, then walked over to the setting and stood before the chaise longue for just a moment, shoulders slightly tense, before she finally shrugged out of her robe and turned to face me.

At that moment I realized that I'd underestimated her. This woman was beautiful; really, really beautiful.

I don't know if I can truly explain what I mean. There was nothing remarkable about any of her individual features, although all of them were certainly adequate. But somehow the way they all went together, combined with her manner and bearing and that special energy I had noticed at our first meeting, all added up to something remarkable. The whole was definitely more than the sum of the parts.

This sounds as if I'm objectifying her, but really I'm not. If all I cared about was breasts and legs and such I'd be working for a New York publisher, turning out dust jackets for Danielle Steele and Harold Robbins. But that's not my scene, as I think I've already said.

What really surprised me about the situation was that I'd had to see her in the nude to realize how attractive she was. Normally I like to think I have a pretty good eye for beauty, but Rose had really snuck up on me. It must have been her natural reserve, I guess; her unwillingness to let anything out that she didn't have to let out, especially to a stranger.

My wife nudged me with her elbow, and I realized that, as had happened the first day, I was standing there staring at my subject. I cleared my throat and moved towards her to start composing the scene.

Setting the pose and getting it just exactly right is always the most awkward part of any sitting, especially in doing nudes, and most especially when working with an amateur. The subject is almost always nervous at having that much attention focused on her, and being naked and vulnerable just makes it ten times worse, especially since in order to get just exactly the pose I want there is no way to avoid touching her.

Rose took it fairly well, on the whole. She was understandably jumpy at first, but as I said I'm accustomed to that, and I put on my usual persona of a doctor performing an examination as I moved her arms and legs and tilted her head, trying to position her precisely the way I wanted her. And after a few minutes of this she seemed to relax, as if she'd come to realize that I wasn't a threat to her. Having my wife in the room probably helped, as well.

At last I had everything just right. I hadn't duplicated the pose in the photograph precisely, but I hadn't intended to. That shot was pretty good, but not quite perfect, and the changes I made were a distinct improvement, in my humble opinion.

I took a few steps back to get a broader view of the scene, and nodded approvingly. She looked good, and the setting looked good. I was really pleased with the backdrop I'd used; the shelves of books seemed more appropriate to Rose than the lush frippery they'd used in the film; it gave an aura of wisdom and intelligence to the composition.

But something still wasn't quite right. I frowned, trying to determine what it was, and for a moment I couldn't quite put my finger on it. But then I had it.

"Do you wear glasses?" I asked.

She raised her eyebrows, and nodded. "They're in my purse."

I stepped over behind the privacy screen and found her purse. Sitting next to it on the floor was the shopping bag in which she'd carried her robe and slippers, and as I glanced at it I realized there was still something in it. It looked like a magazine or some sort of largish book, and I suddenly realized that this was something else missing from my setting. I picked up the shopping bag along with her purse and carried them back out front and gave them to her.

She appeared to be surprised to see the shopping bag, but she didn't say anything, just raised her eyebrows again and looked at me as she removed her glasses from her purse.

"I saw it sitting there," I explained, gesturing towards the shopping bag. "I know it's none of my business, but it looks as if it has a book in it, and I thought it might add to the scene, if you don't mind us using it that way."

Again that small quirk of the lips that she used instead of a smile. "Actually, I brought it for just exactly that reason, but you seemed to know what you were doing, and I didn't want to interfere." She opened the bag and pulled out what I now saw to be a moderately thick manuscript and handed it over to me. "Here."

I glanced at the manuscript, and now it was my turn to raise my eyebrows. The title was, "Einstein's Twin Paradox: A New Interpretation". The author's name had been whited out on this copy, which pretty clearly was not the original.

I looked back down at Rose. "Your work?" I asked. Again the quirk of the lips, and she nodded slightly, and I was impressed that she hadn't blushed. This woman had plenty of self-confidence, but never seemed to slide over into arrogance. I was really starting to like her.

For a moment longer I continued to look at her, trying to decide how best to use the manuscript. I had already worked out that since she had taken the trouble to bring something she herself had written, she would want the title page to be visible in the painting. After another moment, I reached down and placed the manuscript in her hands, and rearranged her arms and tilted her head so that it would appear that she had been lounging on the divan reading, and had just looked up because someone had walked in on her. Finally, I took her glasses and slid them onto her face, and stepped back for another look.

It was perfect.

That doesn't happen for me very often. I try very hard to get things right before I start to work, but I'm only human, and inevitably there are flaws. But this time I think I really surpassed myself. This time I had everything just the way I wanted it. And so I set to work.

I started by taking some cheat shots. Rose became nervous again when she saw the camera, but I explained that I needed some photographs to supplement the sittings. I also gave her my standard promise: That after the work was done I would give her all the prints and negatives, and she could destroy them or store them away or do whatever she wished with them, short of publishing them.

The rest of that session went smoothly, and by the end of the three hours we had set aside I had a pretty good idea of where I was going and how I was going to get there. At the end of the sitting she slipped her robe back on, went behind the privacy screen and dressed, then came back out front and gave me one more quirk of her lips and was gone.

We had four more sittings after that one, each roughly a week apart, except for one occasion when she called and told me she had to go out of town on business on short notice. After the first session I didn't bother having my wife present, and Rose seemed comfortable with that arrangement.

I got a little better acquainted with her during these meetings, although I didn't really get to know her. As with most of my subjects, we naturally fell into conversation while we worked, but Rose never seemed to want to talk about anything personal, restricting herself to discussions of her favorite movies and books that she had read, and similar safe subjects. Still, you can learn a lot about a person from their taste in reading and other entertainment, if you really listen.

I've mentioned her self-confidence; another thing that really impressed me about her was her ability to slip easily into the pose we'd established, and then maintain it almost perfectly for the fifty minutes out of each hour that we worked. Even some professionals have trouble holding still for that long, but Rose seemed to take to it very naturally.

The work went well, too. Sometimes, once I get into a project. I start to second guess myself, and see alternatives which I hadn't noticed when I started, and when that happens it can be very frustrating. Once I was within two or three sittings of completing a rather complex work, only to suddenly realize that it just wasn't right. Pitching what I'd done and starting over from scratch is one of the hardest things I'd ever had to do, but in the end it was worth it.

But that didn't happen in this case. Everything just seemed to proceed very smoothly, and I rapidly found myself sinking into that creative haze which means that things are really clicking. That meant my sex life was pretty good too, which of course just fed back into the work, making it better as well.

Finally, three days ago, we were done. I don't think Rose had realized how close we were to being finished, since I never allow my subjects to see the work in progress. And truth be told, I hadn't been sure, myself. But about 90 minutes into that sitting I suddenly realized that I was finished; there was nothing left to add. And so I set down my brush and took a step back to admire my handiwork.

It was good. It was really, really good. I know an artist isn't supposed to praise his own work, but occasionally I get something so right that I just can't help myself. And this was one of those occasions; I knew I'd really captured something this time.

I glanced back across the room at Rose, and saw that she was looking at me questioningly, and I smiled. "It's finished. Want to come and see?"

Of course she did; they always do. Hell, *I* would want to see, if I were the subject.

A moment later she had slipped on her robe and joined me. I turned my own gaze away from the picture, and was watching her face instead, wanting to capture her expression as she had her first look at the painting.

She liked it. I mean she really, really liked it. It showed in her eyes, as they moved from curiosity to surprise to pleased happiness. And that made me feel happy. She liked my picture.

"It's beautiful," she said, and then turned to look up at me. "Is that really me?"

I'd been expecting that question; the amateurs always ask that. "Yes," I replied without hesitation. "That's really you."

And it really was. I don't cheat with my art; I try to portray what I see. Oh, I'd made a few minor changes -- I'd made her hair a little longer than it really was, to go with the period we were trying to capture, and I'd made her breasts just slightly firmer than gravity would allow. But it was her; it was really her. Just a very slightly idealized version.

"When can I have it?" she asked, now looking back at the picture again.

"Tomorrow," I replied. "I want to spend a little time with it, make sure I don't want to make any last minute changes -- and if I do, they'll be minor things in the background and such. I want to photograph it, for my personal collection -- I promise that no one will ever see the photograph, other than my wife and myself. And of course it needs to finish drying."

She nodded. "Tomorrow, then. Three o'clock?"

"Three o'clock would be fine."

And she went and got dressed, and a few moments later she was gone.

She showed up right on time the next day. I had the picture safely packed for carrying, along with the prints and negatives from the

cheat shots, and I had an invoice ready for her. The entire transaction took about three minutes, and the only surprise was that she paid me in cash. She tucked the invoice into her purse and picked up the portfolio, then turned to leave.

And suddenly I just had to ask the one question which I never ask my subjects. I don't know why I needed to know, and I didn't really think she would answer. But I had to ask.

"Rose?" She turned in the doorway to look at me. "Why?"

She cocked her head at me, apparently considering the question. Finally, she said, "I'm going to give it to a friend."

I smiled at that. I'd already deduced that part. There aren't a lot of reasons why a woman would commission a picture of that type. "That's not what I meant," I explained. "I meant, 'Why that particular scene?'"

Again, she seemed to think about it for a moment. At last, very softly: "My friend and I -- the one I'm giving this too -- we saw this movie together last summer. And it really struck me how much he and I are like Jack and Rose. There's that same sense of inevitability about our relationship, but also a lot of the same sorts of obstacles."

She shrugged. "I don't know if I can explain it very well. But there are a lot of barriers between us, and sometimes I feel very trapped and repressed. And he's so much of a risk-taker; his life is so uncertain, so dangerous. It frightens me sometimes, makes me want to keep him at arms length, but at the same time it makes me want to get as close as I can to him, and share whatever he has to face, both the good and the bad." Again that quirk to the lips. "I guess I'm trying to send him a message."

I nodded ever so slightly. "I hope he gets it."

"I hope he does, too," she said. And with that she was gone.

That was two days ago. This morning I received a postcard from her. On the front was a commercially-produced photograph of a still from the movie. It showed the two lead actors dancing together in the grand ballroom, dressed to the nines. And on the back were two words: "Thank you."

There was no return address, but it was postmarked in Alexandria.

I think I've done something good.
>

Fini

End
file.